

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 ARA-10 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01
INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15
USIA-06 IO-13 EUR-12 NEA-10 /104 W
-----016505 290013Z /66
P 281742Z MAR 78
FM USINT HAVANA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1493

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 HAVANA 0792

EO 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINS ET CU
SUBJ: CUBAN INTENTIONS TOWARD ERITREA

REF: STATE 74699

1. SUMMARY: CUBA PROBABLY PREFERS NOT TO BECOME INVOLVED
MILITARILY IN ERITREA, AND HAS OTHER INTERESTS WHICH COUNSEL
AGAINST SUCH ACTION, BUT IF THE PRESSURES GROW CASTRO'S
TROOPS WILL BE AVAILABLE. END SUMMARY

2. IT IS OUR IMPRESSION THAT AT LEAST SOME ELEMENTS IN
CUBAN HIERARCHY, PARTICULARLY THOSE WHO ARE SERIOUSLY
CONCERNED ABOUT POSSIBLE ADVERSE IMPACT ON CUBAN RELATIONS WITH
"RADICAL" ARABS SUCH AS IRAQ AND SYRIA AND ON CUBA'S
CREDENTIALS IN NAM, AS WELL AS MORE "MODERATE" ELEMENTS
CONCERNED ABOUT RELATIONS WITH WESTERN EUROPE AND U.S.,
STRONGLY PREFER TO KEEP CUBAN FIGHTING FORCES OUT OF
ERITREA IN FAVOR OF SOME INTERNAL "POLITICAL" SETTLEMENT.
SUCH CUBAN LEADERS CLEARLY RECOGNIZE BOTH THE COMPLEXITY
OF THE INTERNAL POLITICAL PROBLEM IN ERITREA WHICH DOES
NOT LEND ITSELF TO A QUICK FIX BY FORCE, AND THE RIPPLING
INTERNATIONAL REPERCUSSIONS WHICH WOULD SURELY FLOW FROM
AN OVERT SOVIET-CUBAN MILITARY INTERVENTION THERE. (THE
PRESENCE OF RELATIVELY FEW MILITARY "OBSERVERS"

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OR "ADVISERS" MAY NOT APPEAR TOO SENSITIVE EVEN TO
THEM, HOWEVER.)

3. MOREOVER, THE CUBANS HISTORICALLY HAVE BEEN SYMPATHETIC
TO ERITREAN SEPARATIST ASPIRATIONS--BOTH AS A REACTION
TO FORMER WESTERN-ORIENTED REGIMES IN ADDIS ABABA AND
AS A GESTURE OF SOLIDARITY WITH BAGHDAD AND DAMASCUS,

WHO WE UNDERSTAND HAVE PROVIDED SUPPORT TO THE "LEFTIST" ERITREAN LIBERATION GROUPS. THE 1977 CASTRO PLAN FOR A HORN FEDERATION, REFLECTING HAVANA'S SENSITIVITY TO THE ERITREAN FACTOR, REPORTEDLY INCLUDED SEPARATE STATUS FOR ERITREA (AND FOR OGADEN). HOWEVER, THE ALREADY-MANIFESTED HIGH DEGREE OF CUBAN SUPPORT FOR MENGISTU AND HIS EFFORT TO MAINTAIN THE ETHIOPIAN STATE INTACT PLACES IMPORTANT LIMITATIONS ON CUBAN FREEDOM OF ACTION. HIGH-LEVEL CUBANS HAVE TOLD US THAT, WHILE SOME AUTONOMY FOR ERITREA IS DESIRABLE, ANY POLITICAL SOLUTION MUST BE REALIZED WITHIN THE BOUNDS OF CONTINUED ETHIOPIAN TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY AND SOVEREIGNTY AND MAINTENANCE OF ETHIOPIAN ACCESS TO THE RED SEA. (A FACTOR WHICH ALSO BEARS ON ETHIOPIAN PRETENSIONS IN DJIBOUTI--AN AREA ABOUT WHICH THE CUBAN PRESS IS NOW BEGINNING TO BUILD THE SPECTER OF AN IMMINENT US-ENCOURAGED SOMALI ATTACK). THUS, IF THE "LEFTIST" ETHIOPIAN LIBERATION GROUPS (EPLF AND ELF) CANNOT BE BROUGHT TOGETHER POLITICALLY, AND CONVINCED TO END FIGHTING UNDER CONDITIONS ACCEPTABLE TO ADDIS, HAVANA MAY FEEL OBLIGATED, CONTRARY TO ITS PREFERRED INCLINATIONS, TO PROVIDE SUPPORT FOR MENGISTU'S EFFORTS IN THE NORTH. INDEED, THE CUBANS HAVE ALREADY SET THE STAGE FOR SUCH POTENTIAL INVOLVEMENT BY CLAIMING THAT "REACTIONARY" FORCES IN ERITREA, DURING THE OGADEN INVASION, COORDINATED ACTIONS WITH THE SOMALI INVADERS, AND THAT SAUDI ARABIA AND THE REACTIONARY ARABS LOOK ON ERITREA AS A STEPPING-STONE TO DESTROY THE ETHIOPIAN REVOLUTION (A SECRET

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POSSIBLE REFERENCE TO THE ALLEGEDLY SAUDI-SUPPORTED ELF-PLF).

4. THERE ARE OTHER POSSIBLE USES OF CUBAN FORCES THAT MIGHT BECKON IN THE AREA, EITHER AS ALTERNATIVES OR COMPLEMENTS TO ERITREA. ONE IS DJIBOUTI (MENTIONED ABOVE) AND ANOTHER IS THE PDRY WITH SUPPORT TO THE DHOFAR REBELLION IN OMAN AS THE OBJECTIVE. BOTH THESE ALTERNATIVES, HOWEVER, WHILE PRESUMABLY STRATEGICALLY INTERESTING TO THE SOVIETS AND OTHERS, WOULD SEEM TO HAVE SOME OF THE SAME DISADVANTAGES AS ERITREA SO FAR AS CUBA IS CONCERNED; NAMELY, THAT THEY WOULD FURTHER INCITE THE CONSERVATIVE ARAB STATES AND PROBABLY WORRY MANY OTHER THIRD WORLD COUNTRIES AS WELL, THUS DAMAGING CUBA'S POSITION AS THE PUNTATIVE LEADER OF THE NAM AND HOST FOR THE NAM SUMMIT IN 1979. FURTHER CUBAN COMMITMENTS IN BLACK AFRICA, ON THE OTHER HAND, WOULD APPEAR TO RUN FAR LESS RISK OF DIVIDING THE NAM.

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USIA-06 IO-13 EUR-12 NEA-10 /104 W
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5. INDEED, COMPETING NEEDS (AND OPPORTUNITIES)
FOR FORCES IN SOUTHERN AFRICA MAY MILITATE AGAINST
FURTHER CUBAN INTERVENTION IN THE HORN AT THIS TIME.
A STEPPED-UP ROLE TO THE SOUTH, "DEFENDING" BLACK
AFRICA FROM RHODESIAN INCURSIONS AND ACTIVELY (ALTHOUGH
QUIETLY) SUPPORTING GUERRILLA ATTACKS INTO RHODESIA
WOULD BE BOTH POLITICALLY AND MILITARILY APPEALING TO
CUBA, WOULD BE LOGISTICALLY MUCH EASIER THAN ADVENTURES
IN THE HORN, AND WOULD HAVE THE ADDITIONAL ADVANTAGE OF
COMPLEMENTING THE CONTINUING REQUIREMENT FOR SHORING UP
NETO'S REGIME IN ANGOLA.

6. IN THE FINAL ANALYSIS, FIDEL CASTRO MAKES THE
FOREIGN AND MILITARY POLICY DECISIONS FOR CUBA,
AND HE IS SURROUNDED BY POWERFUL RADICAL ADVISERS, NOTABLY
BROTHER RAUL, WHO STILL OUTWEIGH THE RELATIVE MODERATES AND
FOREIGN AFFAIRS TECHNICIANS WHEN THE CHIPS ARE DOWN. THEY
ARE COMMITTED IDEOLOGICALLY AND POLITICALLY TO AN ACTIVIST
"REVOLUTIONARY" AND "INTERNATIONALIST" POLICY (WHICH
MOST RECENTLY HAS BEEN DEFINED AS SUPPORT OF MENGISTU)
AND ARE NOT AFRAID TO RUN RISKS FOR THAT POLICY. MOREOVER,
THEY ARE BEHOLDEN TO THE SOVIETS FOR PAST AND CONTINUING
ASSISTANCE, AND ALREADY HAVE MADE A HEAVY INVESTMENT OF
THEIR OWN IN ETHIOPIA. IF CUBA IS INDEED PRESSED HARD BY
THE SOVIETS AND/OR ETHIOPIANS, AND ESPECIALLY IF IT SHOULD
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GENUINELY PERCEIVE THE ERITREAN SITUATION AS A SERIOUS
THREAT TO THE CONTINUATION OF THE ETHIOPIAN
REVOLUTIONARY GOVERNMENT, CASTRO WOULD ALMOST SURELY
AGREE TO UNDERTAKE AN ACTIVE MILITARY ROLE IN ERITREA--
REGARDLESS OF THE COSTS SOME OF HIS ADVISORS MAY

PERCEIVE. IN THAT EVENTUALITY, HE WOULD NO DOUBT SEEK
A PLAUSIBLE ALIBI TO MITIGATE ADVERSE
INTERNATIONAL REACTIONS, PREFERABLY ON THAT ALLEGES
PRIOR EXTERNAL (I.E., CONSERVATIVE ARAB AND WESTERN)
INTERVENTION ON THE SIDE OF THE ERITREANS.

7. PARADOXICALLY, THE MOST EFFECTIVE WESTERN LEVERAGE
TO COUNTERBALANCE ANY POSSIBLE CASTRO ERITREAN INTER-
VENTION MAY LIE IN "RADICAL" ARAB CAPITALS SUCH AS DAMASCUS,
BAGHDAD AND TRIPOLI. CASTRO'S THIRD WORLD-ORIENTED
INSTINCTS AND ADVISORS WILL RESPOND MOST READILY TO
CAUTIONS FROM THE "RADICAL" LEFT. IT IS, OF COURSE,
IMPOSSIBLE FOR US TO JUDGE TO WHAT DEGREE THE "RADICAL"
ARAB COUNTRIES NOW SEE THEIR INTERESTS ENGAGED IN ERITREA
AND TO WHAT EXTENT THEY CAN BE PERSUADED TO CAUTION
CUBA. (WE NOTE, FOR EXAMPLE, THAT THE CUBANS AND IRAQIS
NOW APPEAR TO BE UPGRADING THEIR TIES.)

8. DEPARTMENT MAY WISH TO REPEAT THIS MESSAGE TO HORN OF
AFRICA COLLECTIVE COUNTRIES.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: SPHERE OF INFLUENCE
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 28 mar 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978HAVANA00792
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780135-0197
Format: TEL
From: HAVANA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780319/aaaaapzd.tel
Line Count: 191
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: d54981bc-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION AF
Original Classification: SECRET
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: SECRET
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 78 STATE 74699
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 28 apr 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3185817
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: CUBAN INTENTIONS TOWARD ERITREA
TAGS: PINS, ET, CU
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/d54981bc-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014